

## **HUMAN RESOURCES BULLETIN 98-07**

### **Strengthening Our Commitment to Service**

On 22 April 1998 President Clinton began a new initiative to strengthen citizen service. As part of this initiative, the President has asked Federal agencies to use work scheduling flexibilities to allow Federal employees to plan and take time for community service as the public business permits.

#### Scheduling Work and Time Off

General: Managers have considerable flexibility in scheduling employees' hours of work and time off. Supervisors who receive employees' requests for changes in work schedules or time off for volunteer activities will consider the effect of the employee's absence or change in duty schedule on work operations and productivity.

Alternative Work Schedules (AWS) - Employees who are covered by Alternative Work Schedules may use the flexibilities available to them under those schedules. Employees who are permitted to earn credit hours may use credit hours (according to provisions of the local AWS plan) to participate in volunteer activities.

Compensatory Time Off - Employees may request and managers may approve compensatory time off in exchange for performing an equal amount of time in irregular or occasional overtime work. For employees under flexible work schedules, managers may approve employee requests for compensatory time off for both regularly scheduled and irregular or occasional overtime work.

Excused Absence (administrative leave) - In very limited circumstances, employees may be granted excused absence for volunteer activities. Circumstances which may be appropriate are those which the district/division determines are not specifically prohibited by law and which satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) The absence is directly related to the agency's mission;
- 2) The absence is officially sponsored or sanctioned by the commander;
- 3) The absence will clearly enhance the professional development or skills of the employee in his or her current position; or
- 4) The absence is brief and is determined to be in the interest of the agency.

Ultimately it is the responsibility of each commander to balance support for employees' volunteer activities with the need to ensure that employees' work requirements are fulfilled and that agency operations are conducted efficiently and effectively.

Part Time Employment and Job Sharing: Part time employment or job-sharing may be appropriate for employees who request such arrangements in connection with performing volunteer service.

Other Considerations:

Prohibition on Coercion: While managers, supervisors, and other agency officials may encourage employees to become more involved in volunteer activities, employees may not be coerced for the purpose of interfering with their legal rights under flexible and compressed work schedules.

Conflict of Interest and Hatch Act Restrictions: Conflict of interest laws and related regulations governing outside employment for compensation also apply to Federal employees who engage in volunteer activities. Hatch Act restrictions apply to employees who are on duty, as well as to those on paid or unpaid leave.

Use of Government Facilities and Equipment: Employees may not use Government facilities and equipment for other than authorized purposes. Employees may consult their Office of Counsel ethics official for information regarding what may be authorized.

Liability for Work-Related Injuries: The Department of Labor advises that, in most instances, employees who perform mission-related agency sponsored/sanctioned, or skills-enhancing volunteer activities while they are on excused absence are covered by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act for injuries. Other kinds of absences would most likely not be covered.

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